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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 004653

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2025

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SUBJECT: CHARGE'S CONVERSATION WITH RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

DIRECTORATE (DIYANET) CHAIRMAN BARDAKOGLU.

REF: ISTANBUL 01333

Classified By: (U) CDA Nancy McEldowney; E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (C) On August 8, Charge met with Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyonet) Chairman Ali Bardakoglu. Charge and Bardakoglu discussed a number of issues, including the importance of religious freedom and religious tolerance. Charge also inquired about the delayed opening of the Ecumenical Patriarch's youth summer camp on Kinali Island (Reftel). Bardakoglu lamented the existence of the legal and bureaucratic struggles involving the patriarchate and admitted that these difficulties are undermining Turkey's image as an open and tolerant country. However, he also asserted that the problem is not a religious freedom issue, but part of an "international chess game" involving "foreign influences and concerns," including US interests in Russia. The Charge brushed aside this assertion and told Bardakoglu that the opening of Halki Seminary would signify to the world that Turkey is truly an open and tolerant country.

¶12. (C) Comment. Bardakoglu's response to the Charge's inquiries on the patriarchate issue is unfortunately, all too typical of Turkish officials. The Turks do not think of their Greek orthodox residents as Turkish citizens, but as agents of foreign influence. They also believe that USG interest in the issue is rooted in either US domestic politics or international political maneuverings and not due to a genuine interest in religious freedom. End Comment.

MCELDOWNNEY